

District 108 - Re: HB 5192 Conservation, Forestry & Outdoor Recreation Hearing of 11-10-05

From: District 108
To: "rampart_medic52@yahoo.com".GWIA.mihouse
Subject: Re: HB 5192 Conservation, Forestry & Outdoor Recreation Hearing of 11-10-05

**HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES COMMITTEE ON
CONSERVATION, FORESTRY AND OUTDOOR RECREATION
PUBLIC HEARING RE: HB 5192
TO CHANGE THE AGE FOR YOUTH HUNTING
NOVEMBER 10, 2005**

My name is Tim Kobasic, 814 Third Avenue South, Escanaba, MI 49829. I am a Hunter Safety Instructor (#1945) for the Michigan Department of Natural Resources (MDNR) and an All-Terrain-Vehicle Safety Instructor (#1945) also for the Michigan Department of Natural Resources as a Deputized Volunteer for the Delta County Sheriff.

I would have preferred to make this presentation in person, however, logistics were not in my favor and thus I hereby submit this written testimony for the record.

The State of Michigan Department of Natural Resources has been dealing with a dilemma for some time now. For nearly a decade, we have seen the numbers of citizens, who participate in hunting and fishing, dwindle as much as one percent per year. Prior to that, recruitment remained almost even and we now see the average age of hunters in the 40 to 50 year old range. We are not recruiting young hunters.

As a child I was lucky enough to have parents who recognized my want to hunt and a father who took me and my brothers out, increasing my passion for the outdoors and want for more time with my Dad. It was here that I learned about the need to work toward goals, much the same of what I use today in everyday life. I learned to appreciate the game resource and was taught to not waste it. I was also taught the premise of conservation: the need to give back to our natural resources and leave them as good if not better than before.

The excitement I had back then is not shared as much between adults and youth today. Outdoors sports are falling behind in competition to electronic videos, some of which are poisoning the formidable minds of our children. Furthermore, by the time a kid can participate, they may not have the interest because the entry level to hunt in Michigan begins at the age of 12. What is worse is that in order to rifle hunt for big game, a youngster must be 14 years old. The prime age of recruitment is being missed by as much as four years.

There has been a continuing effort to change this inequity and it goes back at least twelve years ago, when a young Michigan hunter took issue with the fact that he couldn't rifle hunt for deer with his dad. He realized that in order for a change to take place, it took the legislators of our state to come together and enact or amend current law. His name is Anders and he was named for the late State Representative and former Natural Resources Commissioner Thomas J. Anderson. He also happens to be the son of current Commissioner Bob Garner.

Since then, and most recently, former State Representative Susan Tabor led the charge and I believe would have been successful had it not been for term limits which ended her tenure. She recognized the need to change what was originally a well meaning public act, to now reduce the age when kids can legally hunt. Her perspective was not just as a legislator but that of a hunting participant and a mother. It is the duty of parents to decide if a child is ready to hunt and must (by law) be with them while afield until they reach the age of 17. Children are also required (by law) to have successfully completed a Hunter Safety Course before they can obtain any license to hunt.

In the time that Sue Tabor pushed for change, she met with some in opposition who feel that the entry ages currently in place should remain as they are. There are some traditionalists who actually have stated their belief that even those kids having successfully completed a hunter safety course and gun hunt for small game at the age of twelve, should still not be allowed to rifle hunt for deer because they "don't like the idea of their using a rifle" or "that some of the safety instructors feel those younger than 14 are not qualified to rifle hunt". If the later statement is true, I question whether the instructor was in error to pass the youth in the first place.

The arena where this should be dealt with is within the Michigan Department of Natural Resources Commission (MDNR/NRC). The people of Michigan gave the charge of game management to the NRC and I believe the age in which a hunter should be allowed to participate should also be resolved here. The NRC has the ability to monitor concerns and limit participation where applicable. They already set the standards for hunter safety training.

The MDNR is investing a good some of money into recruiting youth as outdoors participants. Youth mentoring remains a high priority of our Michigan leadership via Dan Mulhern, the husband of our Governor, Jennifer Granholm. They believe that a mix of activity with adults is vital to the future of our kids. What better way to cement the process than by hunting and fishing in Michigan.

Michigan has recently been highlighted as the worst state in the nation for recruiting youth hunters. This dismal statistic can and should immediately change. We need the Michigan Legislature to pass HB 5192 now! No more delays!

I have appeared before the Michigan Natural Resources Commission and they have indicated their support for this proposal. I have recently been advised by NRC Chairman Keith Charters and MDNR Director Becky Humphries that Governor Granholm is also in support of this legislation.

Now is the time to come together in a bi-partisan effort for our kids and positive future of Michigan's outdoors heritage.

Thank you.

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